

**The Importance of Prenatal Care:**

**A Second Pair of Hands**

A prenatal program that will provide services in the areas of mental health, nutrition, finances, parenting, safety, and family resources.

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Prenatal care is important to the health and well being of not only the mother and the child, but also the entire family. By providing proper care and holistic services the proposed program, “A Second Pair of Hands” will equate to a better future for families.

The importance of prenatal care was established in the article, *Potentially avoidable maternity complications: An indicator of access to prenatal and primary care during pregnancy* where the authors compared Potentially Avoidable Maternal Complications (PAMC's). PAMC's are variables that can affect an unborn child depending on the amount of prenatal care a mother receives prior to birth. The results showed that adequate prenatal care reduced PAMC's. Therefore, with proper, early, and regular prenatal visits the health of a mother and child can increase, and can decrease the likelihood of developing a PAMC (Laditka, Laditka, Mastanduno, Lauria, & Foster, 2005).

A mother's pursuit of prenatal care can mean the difference between a healthy infant and one who is more likely to suffer from low birth weight and premature birth that may lead to death. According to MacDorman and Matthews (2008), in 2005, the United States infant mortality rate was 6.86 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate has been at about the same level since 2000. The United States ranks 29th among developed countries on lowest infant death mortality. There are many factors that play a role into why the United States' infant mortality rate is high, but one may be the lack of quality prenatal care.

In order to provide quality prenatal care, it can be valuable for the United States to explore what other countries are doing to assist their mothers during and after pregnancy. According to World Health Organization as stated in National Public Radio, France is rated at the top in regards to their Health Care System (Shapiro, 2008) and their “family-friendly” approach. The French assist families by placing high importance to families with pregnant women. Their local “Maternal and Infant Protection Service” sponsor these nurses, which allows them to provide one-hour home visits to the mother's home for that one week after the birth of the baby. This does not cost the family any

money and requires absolutely no paper work; it is simply part of their healthcare. By providing in-home assistance to the mother after the baby is born, there are great benefits for the entire family; in-home assistance can potentially increase health and family well-being.

Although France has universal healthcare, which assists families, the United States has a very popular and widely used program, “The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children” (WIC). This program is designed to assist low income, at-risk women, infants, and children whose objective is to improve nutrition. WIC is found extremely beneficial to participant families. One of the studies on the effects of WIC participation found that the “mean birth weight of 897 infants born to WIC participants was higher than that of 400 infants born to non-WIC mothers” (Owen & Owen, 1997, p.779). It was also found that birth weights increased according to duration of maternal participation; indicating that women who enter WIC early in pregnancy and remain in the program until birth of the infant receive greater benefit than those who enter WIC later in pregnancy and those who drop out (Owen & Owen, 1997). This shows that nutrition education and early assistance has been beneficial to both women and infants. Programs such as WIC can make a difference in the quality of prenatal care.

After reviewing maternal risks during pregnancy and the importance of prenatal services and healthcare, it is clear that there is a great need for a program that will incorporate all basic needs for prenatal care. A program that assists pregnant women will also benefit the entire family; providing an array of services will prevent risks to the mother and the infant, and will essentially affect the future of the family.

#### *Program Overview: A Second Pair of Hands*

By working and learning from other sectors such as financial institutions and government agencies, socially aggressive non-profits will learn to discontinue old inefficient practices (William, Kilmer, & O'Flanagan, 2004). It is equally important to look at the quality of programs through the lenses of other cultures. In 2005, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality established what

they called "patient centered markers" with the goal of focusing on, "The importance of approaching the patient as a person, acknowledging the psychological context of health concerns, attentions to cultural factors, and decision making between the provider and the patient" (Wheatley, Kelley, Peacock, & Delgado, 2008, p. 1589). The patient centered markers, used to judge the quality of a facility, include: listening carefully, explaining things, showing respect, and spending enough time with the patient. The patient centered markers can also serve as efficient determinants of a non-profit's effectiveness when delivering services to patients.

The goal of A Second Pair of Hands is to look at the needs of families in a holistic fashion; it is our intention to empower our expectant mothers and families with an array of skills needed to thrive in today's world. A Second Set of Hands, a non-profit program, will work in collaboration with four major hospitals in the Los Angeles area and their feeder clinics in order to outreach and publicize to the expectant mother population. The goal of the program is to serve 80 mothers/families; 20 from each hospital. The program will operate on a first come, first serve basis until the quota is met. The cost of the program to families is need-based. If mothers have the means or medical insurance to pay for the services they will be asked to pay a portion. If mothers do not have the means to cover the cost, the program will be subsidized. The bulk of the financial needs required to ensure the program's success will be acquired through private donations, grants, and state and federal subsidies.

More specifically, expectant mothers would qualify to apply to the program as early as one month of gestation but would not be admitted until second month of pregnancy. The duration of our program is from the second month until the seventh month of the pregnancy. The program will offer six different services based on the topics of nutrition, finance, mental health, parenting, safety, and family resources. The schedule is as follows: Month 2—Nutrition, Month 3—Finance, Month 4—Mental Health, Month 5—Parenting, Month 6—Safety, and Month 7—Family Resources. The program will also make some exceptions to the schedule and provide services to families based on

their perceived need. For example, if a family wished to go through the financial services program first because they feel it is more imperative, they may do so. Because commitment and attendance are perceived to be a problem, our goal is to make this program as family-friendly and accessible as possible by working around the parents' schedules and providing in-home assistance or classroom setting workshops. The following is a more detailed look into the importance of each service provided and how it will be implemented.

### *Program Services*

#### *Mental Health*

Mental distress is a hidden and many times suppressed subject that pregnant women go through. According to Miller, Underwood, and Raymond (2006) many women hide what they are really feeling about their pregnancy and are often cranky, anxious, exhausted or stressed. Many people assume that women are happy during their pregnancy without realizing how much is going through their mind and with their hormones. Women's mental state during this time is crucial not only for the mother but for the infant as well. With our mental health service we will build a strong and trustful relationship with the pregnant women so that they are able to open up to us and develop trust. A strong relationship will help us know the women better and understand their emotions to help track any sort of depression symptoms. We will set dates to meet with them either once or twice a week, at their local center in the Los Angeles area or at their home. During these sessions, both parents can attend to be educated about the different types of symptoms/emotions that are normal during pregnancy and to assess any symptoms, if needed. The sessions will also consist of a therapy session where women will share any particular emotions that they feel.

#### *Nutrition*

Strong correlations have been found between successful pregnancies, and adequate dietary intake; nutrition is a key component during pregnancy in order to maintain good health of the mother and infant. Mothers and their unborn infants are at higher risk of a weak immune system because

“...[an] unborn baby's immune system is not even developed enough to fight off harmful food borne microorganisms" (US Food and Drug Administration, 2005). The daily consumption of whole-grain breads and cereals, leafy green and yellow vegetables, and fruits is necessary to provide pregnant mothers the additional minerals, vitamins, iron, and the folic acid needed throughout their pregnancy.

During pregnancy mothers are required to gain adequate body weight in order to maintain a healthy pregnancy. Gaining a healthy amount of weight may help to have a more comfortable pregnancy and delivery. It also may help women have fewer pregnancy complications, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, constipation, and backaches. Gaining too little weight during pregnancy makes it hard for the baby to grow properly. Gaining too much weight may increase the chances of having “a longer labor and more difficult delivery" (Weight Control Information Network, 2002). Good nutrition should be recognized for the energy value that it contributes to mothers. It is important because the demands of pregnancy are overwhelming on the body and mind.

Our program will provide very basic culinary instruction to primarily benefit the mother and growing infant. We will then explore healthy alternatives in order to make adequate dietary decisions for the entire family. The program will provide instruction as to how to prepare various menus, which include alternatives for the vegetarian moms. Possible menus will include Kosher meals, Halei meals and others to accommodate the different needs of our clients. We will deliver these classes in the comfort of the family's home or at our center in a classroom setting. Counselors will also provide the ingredients required for the meals being taught on the day of instruction. Our goal is that mothers will take a step towards healthier options on a long term basis.

### *Parenting*

Teaching different styles of disciplining children is also a goal for *A Second Pair of Hands*. Many parents do not realize how parenting styles can affect their children. The main reason for parents to discipline their children is to teach, have control, socialize and influence their children (Darling, 1999). It is imperative for parents to have accurate knowledge of how to best discipline

their child. Another approach for parents when disciplining their children is to take into consideration the age of the child (Graham, n.d). It is important to be educated on the development of emotions for a particular age so that a parent can discipline their child understanding what is comprehensible during particular developmental stage.

Our program will provide parents parenting workshops where the parents can decide if they want to have parenting sessions at their home or go to a session where other parents will be participating as a group. There will be sessions where the parents will listen to the lecturer to learn about the different parenting styles and how effective each style is. Parents will work and discuss with other parents in group sessions where they can do practical exercises. For parents that would like to do it at their home, it would be the same thing only without the other parents.

### *Safety*

Safety is a very important issue when it comes to the health and well-being of an infant. There are many dangers that people may not know about that can endanger an infant's life. For example, toys that we may believe are safe for a child to use can actually be a choking hazard such as rattles, squeeze toys, teethingers, and any toy that has a round shape end. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (n.d.), the largest rattle known to have lodged in an infant's throat had an end about the size of a golf ball. A child can also die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) unexpectedly. Most incidents happen when an infant is asleep in their crib. According to the Minnesota Department of Health (2004) the Back to Sleep campaign helped to reduce the rate of SIDS by almost 50%. Being informed and reading and following all instructions that come with baby products can help keep an infant as safe as possible and reduce the risk of accidental death.

The safety workshops for our program will be held at the home of the parents and in classroom settings. Baby products will be brought in to teach the expectant mothers about the possible dangers that exist with baby products such as walkers, high chairs, cribs, and baby toys. The mothers will also be taught the importance of the instruction and caution labels of the

different products. Experts will go into the homes of these families and inspect the products that the families have. Finally, our professional staff will also assist with the baby proofing of the home.

Taking every precaution necessary can be life saving.

### *Finance*

Finance is a factor that couples have to take into account when expecting a child. Many times, couples think that they can afford to raise a child while only thinking about their present financial state. However, thinking about the future financial stability of both the parents and the child is as important as the present. Having a first child is overwhelming and not knowing how to handle finances can add on to the stress of first time parenthood.

Parents often forget about their retirement and they spend excessive amounts of money on their children. “When it comes to the kids, parents often let emotions rule over financial prudence” (Todorova, 2007, p. 1). Parents are willing to spend as much as they can on their children with the best intentions, but some do not realize that in the long run not saving up for themselves is risky. According to Garskof (2008), parents have to think about their future and think about the many financial decisions they have to make to assure a stable financial life.

*A Second Pair of Hands* will assist families in budgeting and financial planning by providing workshops in financial assessments, budgeting tips and basic financial knowledge. Parents, individually or together, will be offered a financial workshop one day a week for a four-week period. Each meeting providing a different financial topic, *Budgeting and Debt*, *Saving*, *Baby’s Future*, and *Parent Future*. Professionals will be available to the parents in a group setting/classroom setting or through in-home instruction. This will allow the parents to have an option to engage with other parents who are also seeking financial planning assistance, or to have instruction in the comfort of their own home to fit their schedule. Under this finance service, financial experts will teach parents how to budget and where to cut back on their expenses. We will help parents look at their monthly cash-flow statements and teach them how to budget based on their income and variable and fixed



expenses. Parents will also learn how to save on a monthly basis, for a college fund, and for their own retirement. This service will give parents the essential tools to learn how to deal with their finances for better financial stability.

### *Family Resources*

Another important variable in family success is teaching parents and families how to be resourceful. Resourceful parents can find many free or low cost services or activities. Being resourceful is especially important for low income parents as they may not have ease of access to many material or financial resources. Parents need to simply explore their local government agencies, recreation centers, public school systems, and community organizations. Also, living in a computer age world, it is important that parents master the use of computers in order to better aid their children and themselves. Parents must know how to use the internet as a tool which will greatly expand their access to resources across broader spectrum. Parents need to learn to be active, not reactive.

The first component of teaching parents how to be resourceful is to teach parents computer literacy. They will be offered classes either in home or at our center. The primary focus will be on the use of the Microsoft Office Suite or similar processing programs. It is beneficial for parents to have basic use of such programs as they are typically required of their children's class work this day in age. We wish that our parents serve as a resource for their children. The secondary focus will be on teaching parents how to navigate thoroughly through the internet in order to find resources for their family.

Prenatal care is important to the health and well being of an entire family. It is our belief that if we can work with local families in our community we will, in long term, create a riveting impact on the world: work locally, think globally. Therefore by providing proper care and holistic resources to pregnant mothers and their families, "A Second Pair of Hands" will connect to a better future for families and the world.

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